The Best of Gypsy Music from Eastern Europe

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Gypsy music has a certain fascination, a mystery of far-away places, a kind of longing, a sadness but often such exuberant and fiery enthusiasm as to make the listeners' hearts pound and feet tap. Gypsy musicians, many having learned their instruments from early childhood, usually are virtuoso players of their instruments and are able to express and project a rainbow of emotions with their *guitars, accordions, violins,* etc.

The term 'gypsy music' refers strictly to the gypsies' own folk music, but in its broadest sense has become a general term for music performed and cultivated by gypsies.

The gypsies were/are an itinerant people believed to have originated from northern India, their language being akin to Sanskrit. By the 9th century they were in Persia and by the 11th they had reached Bulgaria, by the 15th century they were present throughout the Balkans and in many European countries. As many Roma worked as musicians or entertainers, they had a considerable impact on the music of the countries they lived in - their own particular musical style often combined with the folk music of a particular country, thus preserving the traditions over centuries.

In the 20th century gypsy musicians are found not only in Hungary and Romania but also from Iran through the Balkans to the Russian Republics, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Andalusia and even North Africa. Everywhere they perform their music in a style and on instruments characteristic of the region and its inhabitants.

Today's so-called gypsy repertoire can be described as a blend of influences from all the areas listed above. The Roma have influenced musical works by Bizet, Brahms and Dvořák, to name but a few.

This collection highlights a variety of gypsy music from Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia.

Kanizsa Csillagai (Stars of Kanizsa) is a traditional Gypsy group, founded in 1993 by five young *Boyash* and Wallachian Gypsies from *Nagykanizsa*. *Zoltán Horváth*, the leader of the group, is singer, guitarist and dancer. His wife *Ibolya* sings and dances. Zoltan's younger brother *Sándor Horváth* sings and plays *tambura* (a long-necked lute). Ibolya's younger brother *Attila Havasi* plays the pitcher (mouth-bass) and dances. *Vendel Orsós* sings, dances and plays wooden spoons.

Kanizsa Csillagai had their debut at the biggest Hungarian quiz show *"Ki Mit Tud?"* (Who knows something?) in Nagykanizsa, 1993. They made it to the semi-finals in the folk dance category and in the folk music category at the *"Ki Mit Tud?"* in 1996. They received an award of the city of Nagykanizsa for this production. They also received *"Public Awards"* from the *"Association of Hungarian Gypsies"* in 2001.

Khamoro Budapest Band is a folklore band that plays authentic contemporary Hungarian gypsy music sourced from all over the country. Besides collected music and covers, they write, compose and publish their own songs. The band's musical style is unique. Their songs are sourced principally from the existing treasure of traditional music from Ófehértó, Nagyecsed and the Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg-County. Due to the dedication of the band-leader Zsolt Farkas and the whole band, they became one of the most traditional groups in the country.

Khamoro endeavours to get gypsy culture accepted and represented at Hungarian and worldwide cultural forums. The band's main duty is to improve, propagate and research gypsy music, dance, language and traditions.

KAL Band is an urban Romani band from Belgrade. Western reviewers call their style *"Rock 'n' Roma"* which probably best reflects their music. From their beginnings in 2006 to the present, the band has played over 400 concerts. They have performed at the most important local, European and international festivals and achieved a remarkable career in Europe. Among others, they played at festivals such as *Roskilde* in Denmark, *Fusion Festival* in Berlin, *Pepsi Sziget* Festival in Budapest and the local *EXIT* Festival.

András Farkas was born in Budapest in 1948. He comes from a family of renowned Hungarian musicians. Following his father's example, he began to play the violin at the age of five. He studied music and violin for seventeen years at various music schools in Budapest. After his exams as a conductor he toured throughout Europe and Canada with well-known bands. He has played at first class hotels, at weddings of European nobility, at the "Munich Festival Ball" and various large functions as well as TV and radio.

Taraful din Baia

The Gypsy band Taraful din Baia with the typical instrumentation of two violins and accordion presents Gypsy music from Banat and Transylvania. Taraful din Baia ('Taraf' means a group of Lautari musicians) play at wedding parties throughout Romania. The majority of their music is from the Banat where Serbian influence is present. Wind instruments are specific to Serbian Gypsy music.

Ibro Lolov is known in Bulgaria as a legend of Bulgarian folk music. The virtuoso accordionist is a third-generation musician whose father founded one of the most popular Bulgarian folk orchestras. The Italian "Paolo Soprani Company" created and manufactured a special accordion for Ibro Lolov. His playing technique features the virtuosity of the gypsy musicians and shows a phenomenal sense of style.

Ibro Lovlov has toured extensively in Bulgaria, the former Yugoslavia, Greece, Germany and Israel amongst others. In 1983 he won First Prize at the international festival 'The Heart of the Accordionist' in Paris. Today Ibro Lolov performs with some of the most outstanding Bulgarian gypsy musicians.

'King Ferus' (Ferus Mustafov), born in eastern Macedonia, is one of the greats of today's Balkan popular folk music. His Roma (gypsy) family has been involved in music for generations. His father Ilmi Jasharov was a well-known musician and reputedly the first to introduce the saxophone into folk music in the southern Balkans.

Ferus studied violin and clarinet at the junior musical academy in his home town. At age seventeen he was invited to tour with the band of Toma Chrehev. The success of this tour inspired him to become a professional musician.

After his military service Ferus worked with various different bands, and finally was invited by band-leader Micha Radivanovich to join him in Sarajevo (Bosnia & Herzegovina), which was a centre of folk-based popular music and of musical experimentation.

Micha eventually went to America and Ferus returned to Macedonia, where he became one of the programming directors for the Rom language Radio and Television programmes in the capital Skopje.

At Peter Barbarich's invitation Ferus went to Slovenia to play at a festival in Ljubljana. After that he and accordionist Milan Zavkov began to tour and participate in many festivals.

Esma Redžepova was born in Skopje, Macedonia. Her extraordinary voice and her talent as a dancer and actress were noticed at an early age. At the age of fourteen she was discovered by the famous musician and band leader Stevo Teodosievski, who furthered her talent and educated her voice.

The Stevo and Esma Ensemble soon became one of the most successful ensembles of the whole Balkan region. Esma performed in the world's most prestigious concert halls, won numerous awards and was nominated the "Queen of Gypsy Music" with over 400 recordings in total. Esma, her husband Stevo and the ensemble have travelled widely, filling stadiums, halls and squares to the last seat. Sharing her gift of music, Esma and the Ensemble Teodosievski, performed thousands of charity concerts. Esma died in December 2016 in Skopje.

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